

My name is Bob Maynard. I am a partner of the Great Falls Clinic and I am here to testify in opposition to SB323.

I work as a hospitalist. My entire job is to take care of patients in the hospital with medical problems. Fours years ago the Clinic and Benefis Healthcare worked together to start the first hospitalist program in Montana. The physicians in the program worked hard to provide hospital medical care to all the patients of physicians who chose to use our services.

Despite this, Benefis chose to have their own program. They informed us of their plans to cancel our contract, and sent out a request for proposal (RFP) to national hospitalist programs. Nominally, we were told we could submit a proposal. However, we felt this was not how you treated a partner in a project and we chose not to submit an RFP, but left the door open if they wished to collaborate with us in the future.

In reviewing the RFP, Benefis proposed offering an exclusive contract, stating that all medical patients without a primary care physician would have to be admitted to their hospitalist service. This would exclude these patients from the Great Falls Clinic hospitalist service, and would be a clear violation of the current COPA. Without the COPA, there would be nothing to prevent Benefis from taking the next step, forcing Great Falls Clinic patients away from their own physicians, and to the physicians of Benefis's own choosing, effectively economic credentialing.

Yes, the clinic has purchased an interest in a small competing 20 bed hospital. However, at the current time this facility has limited capabilities. Well over 95% of my patients by necessity are admitted to Benefis Healthcare. The COPA was designed to protect the public from arbitrary decision-making by a monopolistic hospital. In 2007, we still need these protections. The decision to remove the COPA needs to be left to the discretion of the attorney general, who is in the best position to decide when the region again has true competition. Thank you.